Making the American berdache: Choice or constraint?

From the time the Spanish Conquistadores first explored the western hemisphere, the American berdaches have evoked strong reactions in those who have encountered and studied them. If the missionaries detested them, today they have made something of a comeback, with some scholars asking gay readers to look back to them as to their spiritual ancestors. (1) The berdaches were usually biological males who their lifelong dressed and acted like women in all possible ways, but there were also occasional girls who acted like boys. That is, berdaches were one type of social personage distinguishable from others who, for instance, episodically not permanently crossed gender lines. Throughout the early European conquests, they everywhere met with persecution, but in the twentieth century they came to be eyed with fascination by Western anthropologists, who were engaged by the problems of gender and sexuality that these persons raised. (2)

Thus if during the Spanish Conquests the missionaries, all while recording a great deal of information about them, tended to view the berdaches as creations of the devils who reigned in these American regions, the historians and anthropologists who followed have viewed them in a more secular fashion. For many male and female field workers, they were somewhat repellent, cowardly creatures who just wanted to avoid warfare. (3) At the same time, however, some more sympathetic scholars, and their gay epigones, have perceived them as pure images of the free life style of the aboriginal American, creatures who chose to become what they were in a native American social regime that granted children liberty. (4) On the one hand there was the repressive, Anglo society which had in truth exterminated a good part of native America, on the other the freedom-loving and carefree Indian, whose berdache brother had chosen his own gender identity and was proud of it. (5)

Clearly, this notion of the freely sexual native American child is part of a larger view that as a general proposition, native children were tolerated and even spoiled by elders in a way foreign to Anglo culture. Alas this area of indigenous history—the rearing of native children—has to date not been the subject of much serious study. (6)
Still, a mere glance at the scattered literature touching on the disciplining of children shows that native American child rearing was quite as complex a phenomenon as it has been in other human societies, though it must be said that determining that a culture did or did not physically punish a child does not make that culture more or less liable to have converted some of its children into berdaches. The results of future scientific attention being given the problem of native child rearing will doubtless be controversial but also fascinating--one thinks of the widespread native-American institution of an extra-familial elder charged with disciplining children so that the parents could avoid this task. (7) But if native education is not the subject of the present paper, perhaps the latter can still contribute to a future history of native American education.

The idealized general image of the free-wheeling Indian child is, in turn, only part of a still larger field of imaginings indulged in by some students of native America. Overcoming a century in which the ancient Maya were portrayed as peace-loving farmers when not astronomers, recent students of that people, in deciphering their language and reading its steles have discovered a society whose leaders were saturated with concerns about blood, violence, and power. Now, students of the ancient Anasazi to the north are reaching a consensus that this people as well, far from the docile agriculturalists they have usually been cast as, were also capable of great violence. (8) And there is more. Only recently have scholars begun to disabuse the public of the notion that the indigenous population of North America had lived in a unique "Indian" harmony with nature, taking only what was necessary to its survival. This was in fact an ancient reverie that then swept the field again with the onset of the environmental movement of the 1960s. (9) Finally, only in recent years has the work of certain archaeologists established with scarce room for debate that, as it was among their Toltec and later Aztec cousins far to the south, cannibalism was not unknown among some of the Anazasi nations of the American Southwest, and most strikingly at Chaco Canyon, in the period around 1200 A.D. (10) It is becoming increasingly clear that to an extent greater than has been imagined, earlier enlightened anthropologists' and historians' notions of the first Americans have in part been reactions against the vicious treatment of these early Americans by previous governments, businesses, and individuals up through the nineteenth century.

The romantic image of the unpressed Indian child becoming sexually what he was, is, along with that of the environmental native who could not have been a cannibal, also of recent vintage--scarcely of a century's standing--and one with a limited geographical range. For the image usually applied only to the Indian nations of the present-day United States of America. But what of the rest of this ecumene, that is, of the rich cultures to the north and south of these United States? And what of the sources and times before legions of United States ethnographers spread out in the new American land empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century? Only recently, in fact, have berdaches and figures comparable to them been studied in these distant regions and for these earlier times. Only in the last forty years, indeed, have scholars in the Arctic Inuit regions discovered the existence of berdache-like figures amongst their ethnographic subjects, thus stimulating a discussion as to whether these personages can be compared to the famous berdaches of "the lower forty-eight." And only in 1995 did the present author publish a study of the berdaches that the Spanish soldiers and missionaries discovered and described on the frontiers of their empire from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the first historical study of these fascinating persons.

The new information on berdaches--and from now on, for reasons to be detailed, I shall refer to all such figures across the western hemisphere as berdaches--that has been generated by these inquiries to the south and the north of the present--day United States obviously renders previous studies of just "American" berdaches of dubious general value, and makes it imperative that we integrate what is now known so as to reexamine the state of the problem. Among the many questions that might be raised regarding the berdaches, none proves more important and controversial than the origins of the social type, and that question will be the focus of the following paper. Why has this problem of origins proved nettlesome? Part of the answer is undeniably rooted in contemporary sexual politics. For some, today's thankfully less closeted gay lifestyle puts a premium on the view that individual gays have become what they in truth always were. Stated inversely, gays sometimes fiercely combat any implication that they have become what they are because of some constraint in their upbringing. This means that gays, but not they alone, often resist the notion of social construction in favor of biological
century (16).) Alarcon's informant continued by confirming that as each of these four males died, their places
prostitutional setup could still be found among the Itzas of the Yucatan peninsula at the end of the seventeenth
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River was given hospitality by the chief of a certain village. This chief explained that the four berdaches Alarcon
In 1540 or 1541, the Spanish soldier Hernando de Alarcon while exploring in the lower reaches of the Colorado
mestizo sources on the Spanish frontiers in these centuries.
importance. Indeed, the Spanish sources leave us in no doubt on this score. In what follows, I summarize the
percentage of a male population technically called "sissies" in modern literature--are of secondary not primary
related to the nature of a particular person--for example, that one was effeminate and thus belonged to that small
boys who were especially pretty were raised as berdaches because that beauty attracted future "husbands." (15)
Perhaps equally important is the evidence that in certain Latin American venues, berdaches served a communal
functions that maintained hierarchy.

Implicit in the previous paragraph are two presumptions. The first is that some native American communities at
the time of the Spanish conquests planned for berdaches or, to put it another way, that these polities appointed
berdaches to certain communal functions. The second is that motivations for becoming a berdache that are
related to the nature of a particular person--for example, that one was effeminate and thus belonged to that small
percentage of a male population technically called "sissies" in modern literature--are of secondary not primary
importance. Indeed, the Spanish sources leave us in no doubt on this score. In what follows, I summarize the
most important documents clarifying the appointive status of the berdache as he appears in the Spanish and
mestizo sources as well described the berdaches of this huge area as follows. Berdaches--the word was brought
to America by the first missionaries and appears in colonial ethnographic literature for the first time in the later
sixteenth-century (13) -- always transvested as women. More often than not, these transvestites are said to be
involved in homosexual behavior, in which they always played the passive role opposite another, usually older,
male, who penetrated their mouth or anus. To judge by the Spanish sources, these berdaches were neither
curanderos nor healers, and in no way acted as spiritual mediators or shams or priests between the material
and spiritual world. This did not mean, however, that they had no religious function, and I have shown in Sex
and Conquest that, in different areas of what is today called Latin America, during divine services curacas or
caciques penetrated these berdaches while the latter assumed a submissive posture of prayer. (14) As a general
proposition, it appears that these berdaches served as representational emblems of subordination in their tribes,
the "women" whom the "men" ruled as part of the de facto political order.

These berdaches played a significant social role. Dressed as women, they tended to spend their time in the
company of women's work teams, performing domestic labor, weaving, beading, or whatever pertained to
women in that particular social world. Because they were taller and stronger than women, they seem at times to
have led these women's associations and, for the same reasons of physical strength, they were regularly sought
out by men to be their wives. Indeed there is some evidence here and in other venues to be described later that
boys who were especially pretty were raised as berdaches because that beauty attracted future "husbands." (15)
Perhaps equally important is the evidence that in certain Latin American venues, berdaches served a communal
purpose, for instance, as sex servants for young braves who would otherwise violate the marriageable girls of the
community. All in all, the berdaches in these early settings served demographic, prostitutional, and economic
functions that maintained hierarchy.

I begin with an overview of the institution of the berdache as the Spaniards encountered it, stretching from their
original contact with these peoples in the early sixteenth century until their last entrada, into California, in the
mid-eighteenth century. (12) Until the late seventeenth century, Spanish soldiers and missionaries and several
mestizo sources as well described the berdaches of this huge area as follows. Berdaches--the word was brought
to America by the first missionaries and appears in colonial ethnographic literature for the first time in the later
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the "women" whom the "men" ruled as part of the de facto political order.

While I obviously will not suggest that mature berdaches did not at times act with something like free choice, the
present paper will show that, as far as the origin of any given berdache is concerned, free choice is surely an
untenable proposition if it is applied to young boys and children below the "age of reason," while the making of
berdaches out of adolescents among the Plains nations will prove to also be a social construction. I will try to
integrate what we now know about the origins of the berdaches encountered during the Spanish Conquests, first
with those documented only recently in the Inuit north, including Greenland, and then with the berdaches
discovered within the borders of the present day United States from about 1800 until the present. Through the
study of origins, I hope to render transparent one or more underlying characteristics of the berdache before the
variety of time, place and conquest produced the incredible diversity that now makes the comparative study of
the berdache so daunting.

1. Latin-America at the Time of the Conquests.

In 1540 or 1541, the Spanish soldier Hernando de Alarcon while exploring in the lower reaches of the Colorado
River was given hospitality by the chief of a certain village. This chief explained that the four berdaches Alarcon
saw before him, one of whom was the chief's son, were there for the purpose of providing sexual service to the
community braves, obviously so that the same community's marriageable girls would not be violated. (A similar
prostitutional setup could still be found among the Itzas of the Yucatan peninsula at the end of the seventeenth
century (16).) Alarcon's informant continued by confirming that as each of these four males died, their places
would be filled by the first male born thereafter. In short, in this case a community filled a sexual need from the latent or foetal male resources at its command. We will encounter the same institution elsewhere in the hemisphere at a later point.

Then around the middle of the seventeenth century, in the frontier area of Nueva Granada (Colombia), bishop Fernandez Piedrahita in narrating his missionary activity described an institution he found among the Laches people. If parents had produced only boys among their first five children, custom permitted them to convert one of these boys at least one year of age into a girl, "because every father likes to be served." Here is a case in which domestic rather than communal considerations dictated the creation of a berdache, and our later documentation of this phenomenon of familial balancing of the gender of one's children will prove a decisive link between southern and northern berdaches. It is important to emphasize at this point, however, that neither in Alarcon's experience, nor in that of Piedrahita, can there be any talk of free choice being exercised by the boys in question. Indeed, in the Alarcon case, the cross-gendering was dictated for a foetus before birth.

In fact, there is no case I know of in this immense Latin American frontier historiographic tradition of an individual child who himself is said to have chosen this path. To be sure there are cases of boys said to make their living through prostitution, but they are nor said to have themselves entered that profession as a career choice and of their own free will. Indeed on examination, the entrepreneurial berdaches one meets in these Spanish sources are almost always said to be attached to what, for a better term, we should call harems or brothels run by big men, obviously for motives of profit and patronage. The Spanish ethnographers in fact document coercion. Either it is of the type described above or the origins of the berdache status are said to involve homosexual rape, in which big men first rape and then dress their victims as girls or, inversely, first dress their intended victims as girls and then rape them. Thus the two young Andean berdaches who in mid-sixteenth century defended themselves before a friar by saying that they had not entered that life of their own free will, but had been forced into it by older men perfectly reflects the reality described by all early sources. (17) There are no sources alleging free choice which would permit us to doubt this picture.

Another early source takes us the next step on the road to understanding the quality of constraint that was the lot of the berdache at least in this time and place. In the Florentine Codex, Bernardino de Sahagun (d. 1590) dramatically describes an event surrounding a "small boy" who is about to go off with a group of Aztec merchants. The parents must decide on the gender of their child. What "should [they] make of him," he has the parents ask themselves, with one possibility running as follows: "Is he perchance a woman? Shall I place, perchance, a spindle, a batten, in his hands?" (18) Sahagun does not say what the criteria were for the parents in arriving at their decision, but in the coming pages we will comment further on the tests that were common elsewhere to precisely this end. What is decisive at this point, however, is that in the mid-sixteenth century Valley of Mexico, the executive power to assign a small boy's gender was vested in those parents, rather than being the boy's free choice.

The processes for making a berdache that I have sketched in Meso-, Central and South America in these centuries prove to have been far more tenacious than one might have thought, given the ferocity of the Europeans' attack on the institution. Whereas in Mexico City and Cuzco the berdaches were replaced by bands of "sodomites" who by mid-seventeenth century behaved much like the young homosexual sub-cultures now appearing in Europe, on the frontiers of the Spanish empire the institution of the berdache remained firmly in place. As we have seen, it was alive and well among the Itzas around 1700. In early eighteenth-century Zacatecas and in the province of Texas, there were still many berdaches who as usual accompanied the tribal warriors to battle not to fight--berdaches almost never carried the arms of men--but, as "women of the men of war," to perform the duties that women did at home, including, of course, "their sodomitic excesses" (sus nefandos escesos) with those warriors. (19)

But certainly our main source for the berdaches on the frontiers of the Spanish empire in more recent times is an ethnographic description of these figures in the area around present-day Los Angeles by the Franciscan Geronimo Boscana, who had lived with these natives for many years. This friar wrote in the 1820s, and at that point, he says, the berdaches in this area had largely if not totally passed into history, so that it was the more important to record information about them. The picture of them that emerges from the friar's script is largely unchanged from what we know from earlier Mexican sources, especially as regards their origins. (20) They were "selected" to be berdaches though they were only "infants" or "little children" (chiquitos), Boscana tells us. Then "as they increased in age they were instructed in the duties of women." The capitanes or heads of villages often married them, since they were more robust than women, though with their husbands' permission they could commonly remain prostitutes (rameras) and circulate among the different villages. These berdaches never used
a bow and arrow as did other males, Boscana states, thus “giving notice that they were the most despised people of all.” Significantly, Boscana compared his berdaches to those described by his Franciscan predecessor Juan de Torquemada writing in the early seventeenth century, and in doing so established an important variant: Boscana says that he had met one berdache who had actually married a Christian woman and had two sons by her, something unheard of in the previous literature but which we will encounter later, among the Christianized Inuits of eastern Greenland. (21) This solitary berdache, transvested since childhood but marrying after all, perhaps represented a bridge between the native custom of remaining a berdache for life and Christian insistence on marriage. Yet for all intents and purposes, these California berdaches seem largely identical to those described by Torquemada two hundred years earlier.

2. Arctic Berdaches.

Westerners learned about the far northern berdaches (though I here for the first time apply that name to them) soon after the first European explorations in this part of the world. The Billing Expedition of 1791–92, which explored parts of the Aleutian chain near Kodiak, documented these persons apparently for the first time. Even before the Russians colonized the area, we learn, the natives were accustomed to raise especially handsome boys as women. While growing, these boys engaged in homosexual behavior as passives. (22) The records of the 1805 Langsdorf voyage to the Aleutian Islands confirmed the practice of raising pretty boys as girls, and added details. Their parents instructed them in being women. They depilated all signs of such children’s facial hair, tattooed their chins to resemble those of women, cur their hair like a woman’s, and outfitted them with ornamental glass beads, all so they might serve as concubines. (23) A final source for the voyages in this part of the world, the account of Chor is’ Voyages in 1822, specified what type of a “husband” might want such a creature: Before the Russians came, the Unalaskas, out from Kodiak, gave these berdaches to a rich man in marriage when they reached 15 or 16 years of age. (24)

The far off settlement of Ammassalik at the other end of the Inuit world, on the east coast of Greenland, was only discovered in 1884. In 1905-6, the ethnologist William Thalbitzer found a male who had been raised as a girl. (25) Then in 1914 Gustav Holm described the inverse: girls raised as boys, so that they could hunt with their fathers, and it appears in fact that at the time of the earliest European settlements in these northern communities, female transvestites were encountered much more often than in Mesoamerica. Obviously, in another setting it would be crucial to study each such variant, but the fundamental similarity of children within these various northern groups who were anointed in their roles by parents, which involve long-term transvestism, and the performance of tasks customary for the opposite sex, can hardly be gainsaid. At the end of our exposition, they will be seen to form one social type, whose similarity to what we have documented to the south, and especially in Meso-, Central and South America, is unmistakable.

Let me begin by sketching the characteristics of the berdaches in the Inuit or Eskimo area, to return later to the Aleutian and Western Canadian groups. As noted, the European discovery and missionizing of these Inuit areas only occurred at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which explains why the scientific study of these areas began only a half-century ago. Writing in 1962 on the phenomenon of the sipiniq, an infant who, in the Inuit view, had been a boy as a foetus but became a girl at birth, Bernard Saladin d’Anglure claims pride of place in raising the general question of change of gender among these peoples, followed in 1975 by Rose Dufour. The field work of both these scholars took place on Iglulik Island, northeast of Presqu’ile de Melville in the Northwest Territories. Research soon moved from beliefs about gender bending to its practice. Writing in 1974 and 1991, Jean Briggs says she witnessed actual changes of gender in the Central Arctic and heard of its practice on Baffin Isl and. Finally, and most significant for the questions raised in this paper, is the work of Joelle Robert-Lamblin, who observed this phenomenon extensively in the region of Ammassalik on the east coast of Greenland. In three works dating to 1981 and 1986, the author, as we shall see, directly confronts many of the problems I have raised earlier in the paper, even if she, like previous scholars, never seriously compared what they found in the north to the berdaches further south, not to mention to the historical berdaches of Mesoamerica, who at the time they wrote had not been seriously studied.

Briggs lays out her reading of the phenomenon of the Arctic berdache succinctly in her 1974 article. "If a family has only daughters, a father may decide to bring up one or two daughters as hunters, so that they can help him.... To be sure, they also learn female skills, and eventually they marry and have children, but the masculine training they have received may show itself... [in being] somewhat bossy toward their husbands." (26) Once Briggs had taken account of Robert-Lamblin’s subsequent research, however, she modified her stance, saying in her 1991 article that while cross-gendered upbringing may sometimes end at puberty, in other cases individuals may retain that identity for their entire lives. (27) Thus the key components of these berdaches would seem to be...
as follows: 1) Different from the berdaches we have studied to the south, these Inuit figures are predominantly biological females gendered male or, as the literature has long named them, female berdaches; in a moment we shall see how predominant that assigned gender actually was. 2) The fundamental reason for this regendering is task-driven familial demography or balance, identical to one motivation we have encountered at work in Meso- and South America. 3) Upon reaching puberty, these berdaches may or may not reassume their biological gender. That would be quite distinct from the practice to the south, where the assumption of berdache status usually remained for a lifetime. However, we still have to determine if the return to biological gender had always been possible, or if what Briggs described was an adaptation brought on by the European conquest.

Robert-Lamblin has engaged this phenomenon in such a way as to address the larger questions that flow from it. She begins by rightly rejecting Saladin d'Anglure's argument that a significant part of such gender switching is explained by the fact that the Inuit (like so many other peoples of the world) passed on their names, usually from grandfather to grandchild, commonly with the notion that the sex of that heir would be the opposite of the grandfather's own, thus setting in place the symbolic mechanism for such switches. Robert-Lamblin found little evidence at Ammassalik to support this notion, and believes instead that demographic necessity explains gender switching much more adequately. She then responds to the question of just how substantial such switching was. In research dating from 1967 to 1979, she personally documented 23 cases of Ammassalik girls who were gendered male, but only seven of boys gendered girls, that is, 23% of all such conversions. (28) Yet she leaves no doubt that in fact, the practice was very widespread, and that she had merely scratched the surface. Universally, parents switched the gender of the child in infancy, that is, following recognition of a family need. Researchers have also been interested in the question of the position amongst one's brothers and sisters of the child whose gender was switched. Not surprisingly, Robert-Lamblin found few if any cases where the first child was converted. As one might expect, the one whose gender was modified was usually the third or fourth, that is, one born far enough along in a marriage where the absence of the desired sexed child gave concern to the parents: the father for lack of a hunter to aid him, the mother for lack of a child to help in domestic affairs and to care for her when ill.

It is when we tackle the question of reversion to one's biological gender that the matter becomes complex. Recall first the perhaps unique and certainly late case in the early ethnographic literature where Girolamo Boscana described a berdache who ended by marrying "a Christian woman" and having two children by her. For any student of the accommodations natives had to make to the missionaries, what happened here seems apparent: the friars made it advantageous for a mature non-Christian male to marry this Christian woman, which forced him to modify his berdache status. (29) Now to the Arctic: without alas being able to prove her point of view, Robert-Lamblin nonetheless presents a persuasive case that such reversions are not likely to have occurred before the colonization and religious conversion of Ammassalik. Back then, regendered persons remained in that way for life. (30) Her argument is as follows: Previously, there was nowhere for crossovers to go if they abandoned their assigned genders, but today, both males and females have options for employment that were undreamed of in earlier times. Second, adoption, another means by which a child could avoid being regendered in the first place, is much easier now than it was then. (31) Third, Robert-Lamblin could document the horror that Danish school teachers experienced when they discovered that their Inuit children were not of the gender their persons had led them to believe. Anyone familiar with the Iberian missionary evidence can easily imagine the reaction of the Danes to these young berdaches. Finally, in a personal communication, Robert-Lamblin notes the ever-younger age at which one returns to one's biological gender, suggesting a dynamic whose roots must originate in outside pressure. In sum, then, Robert-Lamblin argues that since missionization, these adolescents have increasingly reverted to their biological gender as a result of colonial pressure in the schools and churches. (32)

The author tops off her argument by showing that in recent years there has grown up a notion that the parental conversion of children's gender harms a child. That sense will soon destroy the institution, she says, "for a part of the population condemns it today," the author for instance citing a hunter who, though in need of a collaborator, decided not to gender his girl male, "since it would have been prejudicial to the child." (33) Thus under the pressure of Western expectations, these Inuits are coming to believe that a child should be allowed to attain the societally expected image of their biological sex without overt parental pressure. This amounts to a betrayal of the fundamental Inuit notion that adults actually control gendering and even the birth process, a central point of Robert Lamblin's and Rose Dufour's work that deserves particular emphasis, since it impacts directly on the general problems raised by this paper.

Perhaps the easiest way to address this complicated subject in a few words is to state that the Inuit had a discrete set of rites aimed at freezing in place the sex of male infants; there was otherwise the danger of their slipping toward femininity. On the other hand, there were those male foetuses, called siqiniq, who in the act of
being born decided to become a biological female, and so surrendered the penis for the vulva and, her life long, remained totally a female. Note that Inuit society did not provide rites for freezing the foetal female's sexuality, or female sexuality in general. I will avoid all the intricacies of these beliefs, except to give their general contour, which is, according to Dufour, that such beliefs and rites give the Inuits a seeming ability to intervene in a process where, in fact, free choice never had a place. These ideas and especially the procedure for fixing masculinity, says Dufour, make the Inuit think that they themselves control the distribution of population. (34)

Precisely the same emphasis on the question of free choice real and alleged informs the work of Robert-Lamblin. She gives an insightful picture on how Inuit parents raise their children, the external pressure of tribal norms being glossed so that those norms come to be self-understood, “for in reality,” she paraphrases the parental attitude in approaching their child, “he knows perfectly well what he ought to do.” (35) But in fact, our author determines, “there is no personal choice of the individual but rather an external intervention upon him.” Family education and the social environment have a “considerable role” in the acquisition of gender identity, and the gender change takes place “even before the child's own nature has been able to manifest itself ... “ (36) Thus the change is made “without the individual's temperament or his personal choice coming into play.” (37)

By contrast, Roscoe, in his Changing Ones, claims that these same denizens of the Arctic in fact allowed latitude for individual preferences, and where the change in gender was forced, those regendered did not have “true berdache status.” (38) He has only ideological conviction but no evidence to back him up, and we will later see whence he derives this insistence on free will. It will escape no reader of this article that the constraint levied on children by parents who knew they controlled their children's gender unmistakably links the experiences of berdaches in the whole of Latin America to those of the Inuit and, as we shall see further on, to the tribes of the present-day United States of America, the land in-between, as well. (39)

The fundamental differences between the berdaches of the Arctic and those of Latin America are two. The first is the clear preponderance of so-called female berdaches over the not-inconsiderable number of male berdaches to the north, whereas to the south the historical sources rarely mention them. I have little to add to the usual explanation of this fact, which is that the small domestic units of the Arctic were primordially dependent on the hunt as a means of survival, making the need for hunters gendered male, with the proper male division of labor, paramount, whereas the complex agricultural warrior states of Meso- and South American had no such paramount need for hunters.

The second main difference between the two areas' berdaches is that, while homosexual behavior was common to the south, no incontrovertible evidence of its presence has yet emerged in the Inuit communities surveyed by the scholars of this area, although Robert-Lamblin does document three cases in Ammallik myth where same sexed individuals lie together. How much this clear absence of homosexual behavior is due to the relatively easy concealment of such activity in the frozen north, in comparison to the heat of the tropics to the south, which made behavior more public in character, is hard to say. But in any case, scholars all but universally downplay the sexual component as determinative in the identification of the berdache. Rather, transvestism and the performance of the other sex's division of labor rule as the crucial elements in this figure's makeup. (40) The berdaches of the north and those of the south are thus fundamentally linked in these underlying structures defining what it is to be a berdache.

After surveying the striking similarities between the Latin American, Northwestern Territory, and Greenland berdaches, to complete our survey of the north let me now touch again on similar personages in the west of present-day Canada. As we have already seen, a berdache status here often--the situation in the Aleutians and around Kodiak is clear--if not always involved homosexual activity. (41) But what is also demonstrable in western Canada is the strong presence of a female berdache alongside the male (both helping the father) (42), of transvestism, and of a perceived association between the reality of sexuality and an elder seeking rebirth in the opposite sex. There is also some evidence that at the time of their observation in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, berdaches in these parts could at some point return to the gender of their biological sex. As we have come to expect, nowhere in the records of this slice of the northern hemisphere is there any talk of free choice. Thus among the Coast Salish, Barnet documented the belief that if parents wanted a girl, the child would end up a (male) berdache gendered female. (43) McLlwraith found the Bella Coola determining that the gender of their male child would be female if a boy showed aptitude for women's work. (44) This meant that the boy wanted to be a girl, and so they dressed him and treated him as such. But as we have seen, such suppositions have nothing to do with free choice, since these subjects were but young children. More to the point is the fact that according to McLlwraith, these berdaches eventually took wives whom they helped in all the female tasks. (45) Again, the problem remains to determine if this reversion resulted from colonization, or was a historical product.
of the nation itself.

In two confusing and badly argued articles, Jean-Guy A. Goulet, even while speaking of the berdache in the titles of both articles, argues against applying that term to these figures among the Kaska, as documented by Honigmann. (46) At one moment he attempts to show that Kaska transvestism did not decisively distinguish men from women, yet at another he leaves no doubt that, as one would expect, the people themselves were totally alert to those differences. Goulet's main reason for denying the term berdache to the Kaska—-that each nation’s own vocabulary should be used (“because of the risk of characterizing disparate phenomena by the same term”) (47)--would be more intriguing if he had used the Kaska language for labeling, if he had defined what he meant by “berdache,” and if he had known the literature on the Inuit I have just analyzed, all of which he did not. Unaware of these matters, it was easy for him to doubt that there were any male berdaches in the Arctic. (48) As I have argued throughout, however, avoiding the term berdache merely because it is “exogenous” is the stuff of pedants afraid to address the broader range of this social type. Differences there are, and many of them, among these groups. But the fundamental characteristics of transvestism and assumption of the labor of the opposite sex unites all of them.

3. The Berdache in What Became the United States of America.

Insistence on humanity's variety of experience is nowhere more called for than in an attempt to survey the tribes of the United States. The task is not just daunting, but one may say overwhelming. However, keep in mind that what follows is only an attempt to find the answer to a single question, which is the relative free choice or constraint in place when a berdache made himself, or was made. I remind the reader again of Will Roscoe's claim that overwhelmingly, the berdache attained this station of his own free will. Posing that single question to the non-Hispanic parts of the present-day United States, I hope to arrive at some tentative answers.

The correct approach to such an overview in this region is to proceed chronologically, turning our attention to begin with to those sections where explorers first drew our attention to berdaches. The Eastern part of this vast area furnishes us precious little evidence. While there are indications that berdache-like figures did once inhabit the Woodlands, very little by way of primary sources remains. However, the picture changes when we move into the Prairie. Almost at once, we encounter an important agglomeration of berdaches among the Illinois tribes in the reports of French explorers and settlers toward the end of the seventeenth century—often before, it should be added, the great tribes of the Western Plains appeared, tribes whose berdaches are often taken to be representative of this social type tout court. Not only that. These Illinois reports clearly address the question of the origins of these berdaches, and leave us in no doubt that, at one with the pictures that we have developed to this point, ad ults constrained very young children to assume the status of berdache. Once again, the figures under question are males become girls, as appears usually to have been the case in the areas of the hemisphere to the south of the Inuit.

The earliest reference to the berdaches of these parts is in Marquette, who, referring in 1673 to the Illinois and the Nadouessi, pleaded ignorance in trying to explain why their berdaches had assumed that status while they were still young, for the rest of their lives. (49) This meant they abased themselves like women, went to war with clubs rather than the man's bow and arrow, etc. For the Frenchman Marquette the fact that these berdaches were consulted as augurs before military action seemed small enough recompense for the life of degradation they otherwise suffered. However, just a few years later, at the turn of the century, other sources shed important light on what for Marquette had been a mystery. In fact, the diarist de Liette explained, these berdaches had their origins not in choice, but in constraints forced on them at a very young age. The author describes the situation as follows. Illinois men were not satisfied by their women, who were not sufficiently forthcoming sexually. To correct this situation, so says de Liette, groups of boys were trained from childhood as passives to satisfy the needs of these braves. Clearly, the threat of the rape of Illinois girls was here just as present as it had been among the Yumas d'Alarcon encountered a century and a half earlier. Candidates for this status were identified as follows, de Liette continues:

When they are seen frequently picking up the spade, the spindle, the axe, but making no use of the bow and arrows... they are girt with a piece of leather or cloth... a thing all the women wear. Their hair is allowed to grow and is fastened behind their head.... They are tattooed on their cheeks like the women... and they imitate their accent, which is different from that of the There are men sufficiently emburited to have dealings with them on the same footing. The women and girls who prostitute themselves to these wretches are dissolute creatures." (50)

We have thus arrived at one characteristic procedure for the native selection of a berdache: the test.
Encountered among scores of tribes across the hemisphere, the native American test to discover one's "real" gender is commonly misunderstood on the natives' own terms, as if some inherent gender identity has merely been recognized by the community. But reflection confirms what is self-evident, namely that whatever the natives' explanation for their actions, they in effect were determining for an infant or young child, a gender that child could not possibly have arrived at by a free action of his other will. This is evidenced by the native traditions themselves, which at times speak for example of the moon goddess (or female Fate) tricking a boy forced to choose by his elders into choosing the hand holding the female accouterment when he thinks he is choosing the other hand, which holds the male implement. (51) Doubtless, this whole process of parents testing for "true" gender deserves the serious study it has as yet not received, but of one thing we can be sure: Wherever we encounter parents or elders imposing gender upon children through such alleged tests, this is really an exercise in parental or other adult authority and not of the child's free will. (52)

Thus de Liette solves Marquette's "mystery" by explaining that Illinois boys were forced in childhood to assume that role, or in La Salle's judgmental words, were set apart from childhood for this detestable purpose." This was to be sure not the only means by which the Illinois created berdaches. As in many other tribes, some of the warrior age who had been dressed as women because they had been branded as "cowards" remained in that garb for life, and thus joined the berdache ranks. (53) We see this image of the berdache in the well-known painting of the Dance of the Berdash by George Catlin, representing either a Sauk or Fox ceremony dedicated to, even while ridiculing, the berdaches of these tribes, closely affiliated as they were to the Illinois. (54)

The same image of berdaches created at an early age to fulfill the social needs of a particular tribe may also be viewed among other tribes of the area. Landes for example was told in 1936 that in earlier times the Prairie Potawatomi young boys would have been guided "by elders and their own visions" to mature as beadworker-berdaches, her source thus combining the constraint of elders with the allegedly individual vision, which we will soon examine. (55) And further down the Mississippi River the berdaches here as elsewhere provided warriors with not only sexual but also other "womanly" services during war. As early as 1687 we find the "chef des femmes" of the Natchez accompanying the warriors on campaign, dressed as a woman and "doing the things women do." (56) Exactly the same role--as sexual providers inter alia, was encountered among the tribes of Texas in the eighteenth century, and so on deep into Zacarécas and beyond. (57) Naturally, this sexual service did not rule out other types of service for the warriors, including not only cooking and cleaning and the like, but, at least in the area of the Plains berdaches serving at times as trusted purveyors of information between tribes. (58)

Before directing our attention to the next area of contact of Europeans with our figure--the Plains--let me emphasize by way of summary that to this point in time, roughly 1800, no evidence exists suggesting that Americans thought of themselves as choosing to be a berdache, let alone evidence that they in fact had exercised choice in this regard. Probably some adolescents did in fact choose in this fashion, but to date, all the available evidence shows that communities or couples or individual adults applied force to convert children of one sex to the opposite gender. A second point also needs to be emphasized. With rare exceptions in the ethnographic record to that date, there is little talk to the effect that a divinity had ordered a person to become a berdache, that is, little sign of supernatural legitimation for the assumption of the status of berdache. (59) Instead, overwhelmingly, the legitimation offered by different nations to this point has to do with demographic and other socio-political considerations faced by the various nations in stabilizing the relation between boys and girls in individual nations.

Yet precisely supernatural legitimation, though not unknown in other cultural areas, figures among the Plains nations as a predominant mode of justifying changing the young from their given sex to the opposite gender, and it is to this area with its somewhat later sources that we now turn. In this cultural area, the vehicle for divine intrusion is one or more visions experienced by the young person not as a child, but usually at puberty, when he passes from childhood to young adulthood. So uniform is this point in time that Ruth Benedict, referring to the Plains nations, actually defines berdaches as "those who at puberty or thereafter took the dress and the occupations of women," (60) and I found no case in which that conversion is said to have taken place at an earlier age in this area. Now, as we shall see, many ethnographers describe the process by which these visions led boys to assume the status of a berdache as an exercise in free will. They had, after all, passed into the age of reason. In this way, the process of the Plains vision becomes standard evidence for the general claim that berdaches as a group chose freely, whereas that context of becoming a berdache in the Plains cannot, as the reader will see, be made to stand for all native peoples and for all earlier times. Still, a correct reading of the scientific literature on these visions will show that constraint and force were at the very heart of the experience of these adolescents when a vision led them to the status of berdache.
We begin with a sensational report of a vision from outside the Plains. Do not be disconcerted: this account will give a sense of the terrible need for authority in the native American's unpredictable world. Just as it does for most of humanity today, this uncertainty in the face of cosmic force led native Americans to at all costs seek signs of supernatural approval before initiating important actions. In southern California in the early nineteenth century, Girolamo Boscana describes how sorcerers gave alcoholic drinks to boys arriving at puberty (even some of the same ones who had been made berdaches in infancy?). After such a boy became intoxicated, he was kept awake and semi-hypnotized by being asked repeatedly if he did not see a lion, or a beaver, a bear or a deer, an eagle or coyote. Obviously, Boscana averred, the exhausted young victim of this treatment was prone to hallucinations involving such animals, imaginations that were then interpreted as visions. (61)

While this vision makes no reference to the status of berdache, it still does introduce us to the heightened sensitivities among those in puberty that made them ideal subjects for determining the collective future. A particular significance was attached to each of the animals listed above, the combinations of animals being open to interpretation by the elders in charge of the visions. (62) Now among the various animals and objects that might appear in a vision, none might be more decisive in this region than the buffalo or the moon, both linked in various ways to womanhood. In the simplest scenario, if one of these two objects appeared repeatedly to a young brave, he was destined to be a she. It might appear, therefore, that these pubescent boys offer solid proof that the Plains berdaches exercised individual choice in adopting that status.

But that notion is little more than smoke. First of all, it seems that among these Plains peoples the first vision of an eventual berdache was precisely the occasion when parents or elders put him to one of the famous tests referred to earlier, and we have seen that in fact, these tests no matter the age of the inductees were fictions of choice and little more. (63) But the appearance of the figures of buffalo and the moon and the like, was also not happenstance, as we have already seen among the Californians. As Wissler studying the Oglala discovered long ago, future berdaches in some areas were in fact expected to have essentially identical visions involving such specific essences as the moon and the buffalo, or perhaps a dream of the Old Woman, all of which were sure signs of the berdache status the particular community of dreams expected one to assume. (64) To put it as graphically as did one American, the cost of resisting this mandate of heaven, once visible, was death. There was "no choice." (65)

Since the tribes of this region usually had a canonical understanding of the significance of such images, therefore, any room for the illusion of choice on the part of the young man who envisaged one of these figures was greatly limited. Lame Deer, for example, made clear that adopting the role of the berdache among the Teton Dakota was not always an exercise in free choice. Rather, one became a berdache, in his words, "by one's own choice or in obedience to a dream" (my italics). (66) Of course, the fiction of choice is always preserved in the accounts of participants, for (formal) choice by the individual visionary--and these Plains visions were always said to be experienced by individuals was the condition of the legitimacy of the oracle's pronouncement. But as we know from the history of oracles the world around, the reality is usually that the community arranges the vision, and we see this clearly when we take one step backwards to examine the context in which these figures actually appeared.

As has often been observed in the literature, youngsters expecting to have visions were at the mercy of their elders and often of shamans, who instructed them in advance what to look for, often were at their sides at the time of vision, to then tell them what they had seen, so to speak, and to interpret those visions for such neophytes. (67) In short, there is a wealth of evidence that in effect, visions, and especially those of the young, were to varying extents social events drawing on all the community's resources for extracting their (desired) meaning. Not for nothing did several tribes construct dream societies, whose one unifying thread was that all members had the same dream, just as it was a common feature of the individual American family in the vision areas that all its members had the same dream. Further, in several tribes of this region visions were bought, sold, and inherited. A vision was before all else, said Benedict, a matter of constraint imposed by the family and in effect represented a serious attempt at family supervision. (68)

So rooted is this comprehension of the native vision that it has recently drawn forth a book that sets out to oppose, or at least qualify, this social interpretation of the vision process. In his Dream Seekers, Lee Irwin uses a phenomenological approach to make his case for the individual transformative power of the native American vision. At his best in showing how visual patterns are legitimately changed through the process of visions, Irwin did persuade this reader of his thesis that "the conventional notion that dreams and visions are stereotyped experiences strictly reflecting cultural norms is not supported by the ethnography" of the Plains and Prairie (my
girls, who were converted into boys. In both of these huge areas, the forced conversion of children into the
Berdache as a person who might choose his lifestyle begin to appear in the (anthropological) sources. All the
historical evidence before us shows that only at the turn to the twentieth century does the image of the
berdache as the free-standing individual it did, when the evidence of the
anthropology came to approach the berdache as the free-standing individual it did, when the evidence of the
social and political construction of the berdache in fact dominates the available evidence.

It is customary in the literature of the vision to distinguish between an individual vision that is discretely social in
nature and one that is more private, and that distinction might seem to have some merit. For instance, it is
definitely necessary to preserve a distinction between the programmed vision in which a future berdache receives his life calling and any future visions that person might have with "his" alter ego. Yet on closer examination, the distinction between a social and private vision may be misleading. It is a fact that the most private of visions rely upon a grammar and heuristic apparatus that is historical or cultural in nature, and only that apparatus can make sense of them. These infra- and superstructures of the vision are, to be sure, products of the collectivity rather than of any given individual. Further, a mechanism that I have called "the unseen seer" in studying medieval European visions appears to have been at work in the Americas as well: an assertedly one-on-one conversation between the visionary and his spirit is in fact observed by a person who is present allegedly without the visionary being aware of him. It is that person's report of this "private" vision which in the end provides the vision's legitimation. (70) No validating witness, in effect, no authority. No wonder, then, that Ruth Benedict was so firm in circumscribing the range of a given vision image. "There would be little difficulty," she said, "in placing any vision-text from any part of North America within at most a group of three or four neighboring tribes. Even the most individualistic of the visions blurs but slightly the tribal outline." (71)

In his recent work, Roscoe does at one point actually recognize the force of the community in these visions. "Most tribal cultures," he says, "and especially those in which visions are credited with bestowing skills and inclinations," "do not view gender identities as being chosen." (72) Yet throughout the book, the same writer repeatedly speaks of these same native individuals desiring an alternate gender identity, and would have us believe, as we have shown, that overwhelmingly, individuals did so desire. (73) This repeated affirmation provides the best evidence of this author's determination to find his homosexual present in the deep American past.

There would be much more to do in studying the berdache that goes beyond the question of their origins, if time
allowed. Let me merely mention two areas that require further research. A recurrent theme I encountered in my
reading which has not, it appears, received as much attention as it deserves, is that berdaches were employed,"
perhaps particularly in the Plains, to dance and otherwise "play women in tribes because women were "too
weak" for certain activities, or, what comes to the same thing, because women were not permitted to participate
in certain ritual activities. This function of male transvestites, encountered elsewhere in the world as well, may
hint at a basic association between representation and gender. (74) Second, I am intrigued by the possibility that
in certain native cultures, berdaches may have been created to permit the passage of property of all types
between generations in situations where blood survivors were not of the sex that could assume such legacies.
We know now how fundamentally important a rationale was family balance in the creation of berdaches. Perhaps of comparable importance were those whose assumed gender would permit families to "balance" themselves in perpetuity. (75)

But a paper dedicated to the study of origins is not the place to elaborate n questions of function. It is much more
important to summarize clearly the argument I have advanced, and then to try to explain how American
anthropology came to approach the berdache as the free-standing individual it did, when the evidence of the
social and political construction of the berdache in fact dominates the available evidence.

The historical evidence before us shows that only at the turn to the twentieth century does the image of the
berdache as a person who might choose his lifestyle begin to appear in the (anthropological) sources. All the
previous historical evidence portrays that figure as constructed through force by parental or tribal authority, from
the Tierra del Fuego through Central and Mesoamerica, across the American southwest including southern
California, and up the Mississippi River to the Illinois, stretching from sources of the sixteenth-through the early
nineteenth century. In that vast area, conversion to the status of berdache was made when the boy was a child
and could not have exercised free choice.

A second line of evidence, that gathered among the Inuit of the far north by recent and contemporary
ethnographers, provides a strikingly similar picture, though here the majority of infants chosen for inversion were
girls, who were converted into boys. In both of these huge areas, the forced conversion of children into the
gender opposite to their sex was determined largely by political and familial considerations, and clearly had none
but a fanciful association to the alleged "wish" of the child. It was the discovery that elders from Colombia to the
far northern reaches of the hemisphere made berdaches for that same reason that convinced me of the
underlying unity of the berdache type across this vast space, despite the possible variation in sexual behavior
that we have noted. One aspect in the Arctic that did forcefully claim our attention was the problem of recidivism.
It is the view of Robert-Lamblin, the leading scholar in this field, that an historical compromise between locals
and Danish Christian educators and missionaries may explain why adolescent berdaches in eastern Greenland
today return to the gender of their biological sex. Yet I could point to other cases in the northern and western
parts of the hemisphere where such recidivism is also practiced, enhancing the possibility, if not the probability,
that such recidivism was a distinct cultural strain among the people of the north that could have predated the
coming of the white man. Still, the thoroughness of these children's transvestite behavior, and their assumption
of the division of labor common to the opposite sex, surely justifies their being called berdaches.

The third line of evidence considered the tribes of the present-day United States of America, and especially those
of the Prairie and Plains. The latter nations were, we have found, marked off clearly both from the Prairie nations
to the east and those to their west by the fact that only in their late teens and not as children did berdaches
emerge from the visions that were a characteristic trait of this area. (76) Given the lack of direct evidence, I
assumed that the particular visions that led some young men to become berdaches came early in these
individuals' vision existence, about eighteen years of age. I then reported the all-but unanimous findings of
serious students of the Plains visions which establishes that the interpretation of visions among these nations
was carefully monitored by family elders, secret-society heads, and the like, to legitimate and replicate
preexisting social bonds: In the end, there was little room for the notion of free choice, and it was seldom enough
claimed. Thus while the visions of future berdaches among the Plains nations seem to definitely announce a
(later) departure from the infantile assignment of gender among most previous nations, the constraint that
"forced" Plains young men into the status of berdache continued to be a dominant feature of this life "choice."
Proof of these three summary points will of course rest in their validation or refutation by subsequent
documentation and analyses. The present essay is one person's attempt to recontextualize the study of the
berdache

We wish finally to observe again that American anthropologists themselves contributed and even built up the
romantic notion of the free warrior who did not have any of the hangups of his white brethren, a theme grounded
of course in popular writers like Karl May and Zane Grey. In a previous work, I have explained how gay activists
were moved to this notion, and will not pursue that story further here, other than to note that their inspiration
often came from mainline anthropology. (77) In closing I would point to one of the outstanding figures in
American anthropology, Alfred Kroeber, in order to show by one example how deeply a certain ideology of the
American native has sunk into the marrow of modern scholarship.

Kroeber was a great admirer of the Franciscan ethnographer Girolamo Boscana, the same Boscana who has
been our main source for the Angelinos and associated tribes of southern California that produced berdaches
from earliest childhood. The Berkeley savant's enthusiasm was justified, for Boscana had lived most of his
mature life among these nations, knew some of their languages, and was an unequaled kenner of their customs.
Despite that admiration, however, Kroeber proved incapable of accepting Boscana's account of the creation of
these young boy-girls. Twice in his monumental study of The Indians of California, Kroeber addressed the friar's
claim that certain boys had been "selected." Both times he rejected that claim, asserting instead and with no
evidence that the conversion of gender was a voluntary act on the part of the boys. (78) Yet on its very face, it is
Boscana who is trustworthy here and Kroeber whose bald assertion is spurious. He gives no reason why in this
instance we should believe him rather than this expert of a century before, who was on the ground in the midst
of these peoples. Clearly, something more was at stake in Kroeber's assertion than his scientific method could
justify. That something may in fact have been the need to preserve "his Indians" from the criticism of his white
countrymen. While that was certainly well-intended, as is much other paternalistic piety, it ended by being a
disservice to the truth, and to the native Americans Kroeber treasured. (79) For it was and is not particularly
surprising that like children everywhere, those of native America inevitably were to a greater or lesser degree the
product of their parents' needs and wishes.

ENDNOTES

(1.) Recent works include W. Roscoe, Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America (New
York, 1998), and R. Trexler, Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest
of the Americas (Ithaca, 1995), both with extensive bibliographies, and the latter's "Gender Subordination and
Political Hierarchy in Prehispanic America," in his Religion in Social Context in Europe and America, 1200-1700 (Tempe, 2001), 553-90. I want to thank Jean Quataert and Pierrette Desy for reading a draft of this article.

(2.) Occasionally writers decline to apply the term berdache to girls who transvest, but see further below why this is wrong. The greatest amount of information regarding female berdaches is collected in S. Lang, Manner als Frauen—Frauen als Manner: Geschlechtsrollenwechsel bei den Indianern Nordamerikas (Hamburg, 1990). Some politically correct, confessional, writers have worked in vain to introduce the term "two-spirit" for berdache because a few present-day native gays are offended by it; see e.g. Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang (eds.), Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality (Urbana, 1997).

(3.) The best insight into what I would call anthropological misogyny directed against berdaches (cf. La Barre's description of their "serious pathology") is given by P. Desy, "L'homme-femme (Les berdaches en Americque du Nord)," Libre, 3 (1978): 57-102, esp. 82, who does not spare female anthropologists, but for Elsie Clews Parsons in particular, see P. Turner Strong's and R. Gutierrez's introductions to her reissued Pueblo Indian Religions, respectively vols. 1 and 2 (Lincoln, 1996).

(4.) The most extreme form of this view is in Roscoe, Changing Ones, but also, see below on A. Kroeber.

(5.) This view is best stated by the ethnohistorian W. Williams, The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture (Boston, 1992).

(6.) The traditional view is, for instance, in C. Calloway, New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America (Baltimore, 1997), 192. Besides occasional recent pamphlets on particular tribes, e.g. by I. and J. Honigmann, "Child Rearing Patterns among the Great Whale River Eskimo," Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska 2.1 (1953): 21-47, see M Shein, The Precolumbian Child (Culver City, CA, 1992), consisting mostly of pictures of the Aztec Codex Mendoza showing child rearing by age. D. Depalma, La pediatria en las culturas aborígenes argentinas (Buenos Aires, 1982), is rich in recent information on the nations of Argentina, but undisciplined and unindexed.

(7.) On official discipliners of children, see Handbook of North American Indians, 20 vols (Washington, 1978-), 8:346 (California) and 12:183, 387, 406, 422 (Plateau). For scattered information on rearing, see the indices of these volumes, under "children, discipline." An early account of native permissiveness toward children is that of Philippe Le Jeune in 1634, paraphrased ibid., 6:193 (in the Quebecois). So soft were adults with children, Le Jeune said, that to evangelize the latter, the religious had to take them away from their so-tolerant villages.

(8.) The breakthrough book on the former was by the regretted L. Schele and M. Miller, The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art (New York, 1986); Ross Hassig points to the link between Maya and Anasazi students, both of whom have discovered the violence that is central to both these societies; "Anasazi Violence: A View from Mesoamerica," in Deciphering Anasazi Violence, with Regional Comparisons to Mesoamerican and Woodland Cultures, ed. P. Bullock (Santa Fe, 1998), 54.


(10.) C. Turner, Man Com: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest (Salt Lake City, 1999). The level of criticism to dare of this book is epitomized by the statement that Turner does not recognize the difference between humans and animals; P. Bullock, in his edited Deciphering Anasazi Violence, 36. For more recent, definitive evidence of cannibalism near Four Corners, see J. Noble Wilford in The New York Times, 9/7/2000 ("Direct Evidence Found for Early Indian Cannibalism").


(12.) What follows, unless otherwise indicated, synthesizes my Sex and Conquest. I consider the sources used in what follows to be reliable, which is not to say "unbiased." For the different value of Spanish source materials,
see ibid., 2-5 et passim. Also the introductory pages to my "Gender Subordination," and my Rejoinder in Anthropos, 93 (1998), 655f.

(13.) Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 164. Obviously, each tribe had, and in many cases still has, its own term for this social type, which it cannot be the task of this paper to review; see F. Karsch-Haack, Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvolker (New York, 1975).

(14.) Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 106-14.

(15.) Ibid., 94, and for beauty in the Arctic, see the early sources cited below.

(16.) Kindly brought to my attention by Peter Sigal and discussed with me by the discoverer of the relevant document, Grant Jones; see his The Conquest of the Last Maya Kingdom (Stanford, 1998), 499, n. 45. The Spanish original, graciously supplied by Jones, is given in my "Gender Subordination," n. 101. For the Alarcon events, and for the Laches case described below, see my Sex and Conquest, 86f.

(17.) "Ellos no tenfan culpa, porque desde el tiempo de su ninez los avian puesto alli sus caciques ..."; ibid., 107, 238, n. 33, and for further elaboration, my "Gender Subordination," 568.

(18.) B. Sahagun, Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain (Santa Fe, 1980), bk. 9:14. This "small boy" was clearly a child: When he accompanied the older merchants, he bore nothing on his back except the group's drinking vessels.

(19.) J. Arlegui, Cronica de la provincia de N S P S Francisco de Zacatecas (Mexico City, 1851), (dated 1737), 143-4.

(20.) For details on the mss. of this work, see Trexler, "Gender Subordination," at n. 67.

(21.) See below.


(24.) L. Choris, Voyage pittoresque autour du monde, avec dos portraits de sauvages d'Amerique, d'Asia, d' Afrique, et des illes do Grand ocean; des paysages, dos vues maritimes, et plusieurs objets d'histoire naturelle; accompagne de descriptions par M. le baron Civier, et M. A. de Chamisso, et d'observations sur les crahumains, par M. le docteur Gall (Paris, 1822), 8. Russian settlers in these parts put boys to other uses. They kidnapped them as hostages, hoping in this way to force amicable relations upon the natives. If the latter rose up, the Russians threatened, inter alia, to rape the boys; cited in Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 186, n. 9.


(29.) See how these things worked in my "From the Mouths of Babes: Christianization by Children in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," now in enlarged form in my Religion in Social Context, 250-92.
By way of comparison: In his "Woman Becomes Man in the Balkans," Rene Gremaux states that very few of the Sworn Virgins among the Albanians returned from male to female gender and married after having lived for a considerable time as sworn virgins in male disguises; Herdt, Third Gender, 270.

The practice of converting girls into boys may have been one way of avoiding female infanticide, well known among the Inuit. Thus making girls into boys may be seen as an intermediate step between that practice and the elimination of gender bending that is happening today.

Saladin d'Anglure ("Du foetus," 64) disagrees with this finding, apparently only because of what "most authors" say. Needless to say, most authors only describe the existing institution.

Robert-Lamblin, "L'influence," 100f; and by the same author, "Changement de sexe' de certains enfants d'Ammassalik (Est Groenland): Un reequilibrage du sex ratio familial?" Etudes Inuit 5 (1981): 120. That damage can occur to infants forced to be the opposite gender is clear in the notorious recent case studied by J. Colapinto, As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl (New York, 2000).


"L'influence," 95.

"L'influence," 99-100.

"L'influence," 105.

Roscoe (Changing Ones, 194) misrepresents an authoritative finding of C. Callender and L. Kochims so as to dismiss such people as not true berdaches. The authors ("The North American Berdache," Current Anthropology 24 [1983]: 444, 451) say that those who were forcibly cross-dressed in order to shame them temporarily were clearly distinct from the berdache, meaning only that insults ad temporem did not make one a berdache. In keeping with his agenda of praising berdaches, Roscoe has them saying that people who were dressed female to inflict shame on them were not "true berdaches."

Robert-Lamblin ("Changement," 123) denies that her subjects were berdaches, but the berdache information she relied on for that judgment came from the Plains where, as her source Desy states, berdaches were not made in infancy, as they were among Robert-Lamblin's subjects, but at adolescence. But before the Plains nations had even formed, the Mesoamerican nations, as we have seen, repeatedly made berdaches who were infants. As for the Plains, see further below.

This does not mean, of course, that the presence or absence of homosexual behavior is unimportant to the understanding of the berdache among his or her own people. For specifics on the various divisions of labor, see Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 131-37.

In his study of The North Alaskan Eskimo (Washington, 1959), 171, R. Spencer could find no indication of homosexual behavior, while the evidence for homosexuality in Kaska culture is not clear; J.-G. Goulet, "The Northern Athapaskan 'Berdache' Reconsidered: On Reading More Than There is in the Ethnographic Record," in Jacobs et al, Two-Spirit People, 50-52. He found no decisive evidence one way or the other that girls become boys engaged in homosexual activity.


Ibid.

Dismissing Callender and Kochims, Williams, and others; J-G. Goulet, "The 'Berdache'/'Two-Spirit': A Comparison of Anthropological and Native Constructions of Gendered Identities Among the Northern


(48.) Goulet, "Northern Athapaskan," 46.

(49.) See the text in Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 116.

(50.) The Western Country in the 17th Century: the Memoirs of Lamothe Cadilla and Pierre Liette, ed. M. Milton Quaife (Chicago, 1947), 112-13. While the reference here to braves penetrating these berdaches is standard enough, that to a berdache having sexual relations with women is almost a unicum in the literature, but the more important for that. For tattooing on the chin among the Aleuts, see above, at n. 12. There are several North American examples of direct sexual coercion in my Sex and Conquest and "Gender Subordination and Political Hierarchy."


(52.) Among the Plains nations, who made their berdaches when the boys were in adolescence, the situation is however not so simple. See further below.

(53.) R. Hauser, "The Berdache and the Illinois Indian Tribe during the Last Half of the Seventeenth Century," Ethnohistory 37 (1990): 45-65, esp. 55, where he argues that those adults forced to dress as women so as to shame them were not "true berdaches." This conflicts squarely with the historical record, and, as shown above, is based on a misreading of Callender and Kochims. Hauser cites an unidentified Frenchman of c. 1700 to the effect that "perhaps no nation in the world scorns women more than these [Illinois] savages usually do.... The bitterest insult that can be offered a savage is to call him a woman."; ibid., 55.

(54.) Reproduced in color on the dust cover of my Sex and Conquest, and in black and white ibid., 119.


(56.) Desy, "L'homme-femme," 63, cites the whole relevant passage of Dumont de Montigny with details on their clothes, division of labor, and confirmation that these chefs were "abused" by the active Natchez "barbarians." Berdaches often seem to have served in peacetime as the heads of economic units composed of women. See Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 137. The "ribald" was a somewhat comparable European male who was a "chef des femmes" in medieval European armies, responsible for disciplining female camp followers in medieval European armies, but he never transvested; R. Trexler, Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence (Binghamton, 1994), 123-25.

(57.) The Texans, who did not carry bow and arrow, identified themselves as "women of the men of war"; J. Arlegui, Cronica de la provincia de NSPS Francisco de Zacatecas, 143-44. Also: "In this nation [in the province of Texas] abound the hermaphrodites [i.e. berdaches] which they call the Monaguia. These go out with the Indians on the campaigns to serve them as well as to drive the herd of horses and mules that are stolen while they fight those who come to take them away"; "Diary of a Visit of Inspection of the Texas Missions Made by Fray Gaspar Jose de Solis in the Year 1767-68," Southwest Historical Quarterly 35 (1931): 44. For the mislabeling "hermaphrodite," see Trexler, Sex and Conquest, 67, 215.

(58.) For the Cheyenne, see G. Grinell, The Fighting Cheyennes (Norman, 1956), 236-64; for the Kootanie "bowdash," "permitted to go from all the camps, without molestation, to carry any message given her to either camp," see "The Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray from December, 1836 to October, 1837," Whitman College Quarterly 16 (1913): 46f.

(59.) Among the Spanish friars, one does encounter an occasional claim that "the devil" fostered such conversions, but the claim is of little value since these nations knew nothing of "the devil," who was the friars' automatic explanation for all things bad. Yet did the friars mean to refer to the indigenous naguales? See "The


(61.) Cited in Duflot de Mofras' Travels on the Pacific Coast, ed. and trans. M. Eyer Wilbur, vol. 2 (Santa Ana, California), 191.


(63.) For the Hidatsa, see Desy, "L'homme-femme," 72; For the Oglala, Sioux, Winnnebago, etc., see Irwin, Dream Seekers, 51.


(69.) Irwin, Dream Seekers, 189, and 168-69 on the "pattern of dialogical exchange" by which the neophyte was led by adults. Further on the passage from one set of legitimated weaving patterns to another is in W. Morris, Jr., Living Maya (New York, 1987).


(72.) Roscoe, Changing Ones, 130.

(73.) Ibid., 196, one of scores of such assertions. I have reviewed Roscoe's work in some detail in my "Gender Subordination."

(74.) Cf. for example the Arabian cases studied by E. Rowson ("The Effeminates of Early Medina," Journal of the American Oriental Society 111 [1991]: 671-93) and U. Wikan (Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman [Baltimore, 1982]). A. Kroeber noted this song and dance occupation of the berdaches in California; Handbook of the Indians of California (Berkeley, 1953), 497. Studying the Pueblo, E. Clews Parsons, "The Last Zuni, 338ff. at least pinpoints the economic factor, distinguishing between "the authentic lifelong economic line" and the "pseudo- or temporary ritual line of burlesque or dance in which clowns or dancers take on parts of women's array or impersonate women or "unsuccessful warriors"; "The Last Zuni Transvestite," American Anthropologist 41 (1939): 338ff. Especially important in this regard is A. Bowers, Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization (Washington, D.C., 1965), 315, 326, 331, and 168, where Bowers notes that that tribe's berdaches "tended to disappear once warfare had ceased and thei r ceremonial system had collapsed."

(75.) Roscoe, for instance, hints that in matrilineal contexts berdaches as "women" may have facilitated the passage of property such as medicine between generations; Changing Ones, 199. Showing how possession of a
bundle passed through berdaches, A. Bowers hints at this role for berdaches, that is, a berdache by playing his opposite gender preserved the principle of linear passage of goods; Mandan Social and Ceremonial Organization (Chicago, 1950), 270. For a "female berdache" or Albanian "sworn virgin" who became a man thirty years ago in part to preserve the property of the patriline, see The National Geographic Magazine (Feb., 2000): 58f, with Pashke's picture.

(76.) Benedict noted this geography in "The Vision in Plains Culture," 1-3.

(77.) Trexler, "Gender Subordination."

(78.) A. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California (Berkeley, 1953), 497, 647.


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